

October 30, 2013

## School Accountability Scorecard

### Introduction

Good morning. Thank you Chairperson Lyons and members of the committee; it is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Steve Gough and I am currently the principal at Comstock Park High School. I've been involved in public education for the past 20 years as a teacher, coach, athletic director, assistant principal and principal. I also have three children who attend Comstock Park Public Schools in grades 2, 4 and 8. I would like to provide you some insight regarding the current school accountability system and possible reforms from the perspective of a school leader, parent and practitioner who is currently in the field working to improve learning for kids.

The current color system implemented this year is far too complicated to have any real impact on school reform. Further, it is too complicated to assist parents and community members in making decisions about their local schools. When looking at a report of all schools in the Kent ISD, it appears that the majority of schools are doing well in terms of student achievement in the core content areas (math, reading, social studies, science, and writing) as they have earned primarily green scores in these components. However, most of the schools in the Kent ISD have earned overall ratings of yellow. It is very difficult to determine why one school may be red and another is green due to the complexity of the scoring system. In addition to the rubric for scoring schools, there are 26 independent variables that can lower a school's overall color ranking. As a result, a school can appear to score well according to the rubric, but earn a lower rating due to performance in one of these 26 areas. In order to have even a basic understanding of how this system is intended to work, you need to spend some time reviewing the online guide which is 28 pages long. Most of the parents that I've worked with during my career are not going to review a 28 page technical guide to determine the quality of their school. They simply want to know if their school is going to provide the programs and supports that their student needs. If the purpose of this system is to provide actionable information for parents, I am suggesting that it is not functioning well.

From an educator's perspective, I can tell you that the current system does nothing to promote the school reform so desperately needed in our system today. It tells me, as a school leader, where the system feels we need to show improvement in terms of our data, but it does not give me any information indicating what we should do or why we should do it. It is a compliance system and educators across the state will work to comply with the system. The system does not promote innovation because innovation requires risk and people that are working to comply don't often take risks. We need a system that encourages educators to look at the needs of their students and work creatively to develop innovative methods to meet those needs. So, if the purpose of the system is to promote positive school reform, I am suggesting that it is not functioning well.

The definition of accountability is a willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions. We need an accountability system that promotes transparency. Accountability does not require punishments or rewards. It requires the character to take responsibility for the outcomes of one's actions. Schools should be required to report student growth and progress to the community, but the system should be simple for schools to implement and easy for parents to understand and the system should encourage schools to look at their local student data and respond in innovative ways that are likely to promote student growth and learning. We need less regulation and compliance and more innovation, reform, and responsibility.

Moving back to an A-F Grading System is likely to increase clarity for parents and members of the community because we are all familiar with this type of system from our own school experiences. However, making the system more clear is only one necessary change. It is also important to ensure that the system of school accountability encourages schools to engage in the kinds of research based reform that we need if we are going to give our students the educational opportunities that they need and deserve. We have been reforming schools in this country with a focus on higher standards and greater accountability since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in the early 1980's and it seems that our progress has been very slow and inadequate at best. It is time for us to pick up the pace and that means that we will all have to work together and we will all have to have the courage to change. Our kids need us to do the work.

Thank you.